



Caroline Grigson. *Menagerie: The History of Exotic Animals in England.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 349 pp. \$45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-871470-5.

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In this lively and entertaining book, zoologist Caroline Grigson traces the history of collections of imported animals in England. She progresses chronologically, organizing chapters by rulers and subdividing them into sections about various animal collectors, traders, and showmen. She begins with medieval and Renaissance collections, starting with the first menagerie in the Tower of London in 1204. Her focus, though, is the age of exploration, in which growing wealth and the discovery of new animals, together with scientific curiosity, fueled the mass importation of wildlife from around the globe. She examines the aristocratic collections, traveling shows, and profitable menageries that housed these animals, until the emergence of zoological gardens in the early nineteenth century.

Grigson uses her expertise to distinguish among the species whose identities are often masked by fluid naming conventions, and provides a helpful glossary. We learn not only of the standard charismatic megafauna, such as elephants, lions, tigers, and rhinoceroses, but also of many others, including wombats, chameleons, capybaras, rattlesnakes, polar bears, nylghais, and a camel painted with spots to impersonate the cameleopard (i.e., giraffe). The dazzling array of birds includes cassowaries, black swans, “spectacularly ugly” king vultures, golden eagles, and

emerald doves. (A useful index of animals is included.) Grigson’s human cast—such as the actor John Philip Kemble, who drunkenly insisted on riding a rhinoceros, and John Bobey, who was born into slavery in Jamaica and ended up running his own English menagerie—is as riveting as the animals. Royalty, aristocrats, traders, rival showmen (and sometimes women), zoologists, and imperiled animal keepers people the book.

Although *Menagerie* has no overarching argument (and no introduction in which to make one), a number of themes recur: exotic animals as status objects and gifts; the postmortem value of these animals’ bodies; the role of menageries in scientific exploration; the shifting boundary between human and (nonhuman) animal; the animals’ suffering; and the significance of their keepers. Exotic animals were frequently imported as gifts for kings, queens, and other important people. After death, the animal bodies could again be gifted for dissection and preservation, as were the elephants that King George III and Queen Charlotte presented to Dr. William Hunter (p. 168). In death these animals contributed to scientific understanding. Their dissection aided comparative anatomy and provided evidence for the development of the theory of evolution. Directors of menageries and the earliest zoological gardens as-

served that their collections had moral and scientific value. Individuals attempted experiments on naturalization and interbreeding, claiming that they would produce useful domestic animals. The resulting zedonks, ligers, and wolf-Pomeranians, however, did not live up to this claim.

Dissection showed the commonality of animal and human, as did living fauna, particularly monkeys and apes. A chimpanzee was dressed up in women's clothes and trained to take tea. Happy Jerry the mandrill was induced to smoke a pipe, which he would do, at four in the afternoon, reclining in an armchair. While these wild animals were being cast in human roles, humans were being treated like animals. Some menagerie owners staged shows of "exotic" humans, and the animal trade was part of a broader colonial exploitation that included the slave trade.

Immense suffering is always just below the narrative's surface. Numerous animals died of cold. Others ingested foreign objects or attacked one another: a polar bear ate a raccoon, a tiger ate a hyena, and a hyena killed a secretary bird. They were confined to small, foul-smelling cages, fed incorrect diets (including bread and sometimes alcohol), and dragged around the countryside over atrocious roads. Grigson occasionally comments on particularly inhumane acts, such as George Wombwell's tiger- and lion-baiting spectacles, the injuries inflicted on the elephant Chune, and John Hunter's experiments on live animals, but she does not address the pervasive cruelty of taking animals from the wild, separating them from their herds, and keeping them in captivity.

The hardships were not confined to animals; their keepers also suffered pain, dismemberment, and even death. These men, Grigson notes, appear less in the record than aristocratic collectors, entrepreneurial traders, and showmen, but they are at least as interesting. A lion ate John Taylor's arm before his eyes; he later became the kindest of the elephant Chune's attendants. A man named Mason was, similarly, not dissuaded from his profes-

sion after a fugitive leopard mauled and disfigured him. Others were less fortunate. One died after his hand was amputated due to monkey bite. A tiger killed Mr. Roberts after he went into its den as part of an act in a traveling show.

We also encounter men who accompanied the animals on their voyages and settled them into their new homes, such as the Indian cheetah-keeper Abdullah, also known as John Morgan, and the three men who attended the cheetahs brought from Seringapatam to the Tower in 1799. It would be interesting to reconstruct these men's experiences, traveling with their charges. Clearly their expertise in animal keeping was often ignored. The Seringapatam cheetahs died soon after their keepers returned to India. Keepers were, notes Grigson, the main repository of knowledge in the care of exotic creatures, but the captives' mortality rate suggests that this expertise was jealously guarded or slow to circulate.

Grigson's book is one of many recent works on animal collecting. Nigel Rothfels, a leading historian of zoos, distinguishes two strands in the historiography: "historians of zoological collections have generally been more interested in an antiquarian task of bringing to light the presence of exotic animals in the past and more convinced by a progressivist view of history, [while] historians of culture have been far more successful in examining the meaning and importance of those animals to their collectors." [1] Grigson falls firmly into the first camp. There are two implications of her adherence to the antiquarian tradition. First, unlike a historian, Grigson does not critique her sources, even when their claims are outlandish (an eleven-foot ostrich is mentioned on p. 189) or when their intent is to amaze the reader. [2] Second, Grigson does not engage with significant developments that have shaped the discipline in recent decades and which pertain to her topic, namely postcolonialism and the "animal turn." [3] Cultural historians have shown how, since ancient times, exotic animals have been used to articulate

imperialist ideologies. In her groundbreaking book, *The Animal Estate*, Harriet Ritvo writes, “The maintenance and study of captive wild animals, simultaneous emblems of human mastery over the natural world and of English dominion over remote territories, offered an especially vivid rhetorical means of reenacting and extending the work of empire.”[4]

Grigson, by contrast, accepts the claims of Sir Stamford Raffles, president of the Zoological Society, that the London Zoo was founded as a scientific institute to rival its French counterpart, and emphatically denies its colonial underpinnings: “Although we can, with hindsight, attribute symbolic values to such exhibitions, it is more pertinent to establish whether they were perceived as such by contemporary eyes— while an elephant, an ape, or a giraffe might excite the curiosity and wonder of a visitor to the Zoo, it is doubtful whether they would impress him or her with visions of Empire” (pp. 264-265). As historians, however, our role is not to recount events from the past while relying on their actors’ stated motivations, but to understand their significance in broader cultural terms. The fact that Raffles— best known to historians as the colonial agent who founded Singapore—and zoo visitors did not overtly articulate imperialist readings of the animal collection does not undermine Ritvo’s argument. Further, the very science that Raffles’s Zoological society sought to promote was itself an imperialist enterprise.[5]

This book’s refusal to engage with colonialism means that it does not question the sources’ racist and orientaling ideologies. Grigson has the disturbing habit of listing animals and humans indiscriminately in the company of an English person. Speaking of Henrietta Maria, wife to Charles I, she writes: “Her household included a train of dwarfs, black servants, monkeys, and dogs of many sizes” (p. 27). Similarly, she writes that the showman and animal trader Gilbert Pidcock “set off across the south of England with Clark’s mountain cats,

now referred to as ‘lion-tigers,’ as well as his own noble lion, a lioness, his Bengal tiger, two ‘Ethiopian Savages,’ a porcupine, and several other mammals and birds” (p. 100, and see also pp. 37, 140). Thus she replicates the attitudes of her sources without interrogating them. A more troubling passage occurs in her recounting of the story of John Bobey, who was brought from Jamaica to be exhibited in a traveling menagerie on account of his vitiligo. Grigson’s source describes Bobey as the “Spotted Indian,” which Grigson misquotes in even more racially loaded language as the “Spotted Negro” (p. 103).[6]

The focus on the imperial center also means that we see little of how the animals were acquired in their native countries. A wider scope would reveal more of the bloody underpinnings of the trade. Rothfels describes the carnage: mothers, even entire herds, were slaughtered in order to capture juveniles of many species (lions, tigers, elephants, rhinoceroses, hippopotami, larger apes). Between one-third and one-half of the newly captured animals soon perished from the trauma of the hunt, and still more died on the journey. “Like most colonial industries ...[the animal trade] was often based on forced labor and was highly destructive in its use of the land.”[7] Grigson’s book only addresses this depredation in its final sentence. Her point, in the conclusion, that animal cruelty still abounds hardly negates the horrors of the past, nor removes our obligation to think seriously about it.

Perhaps these critiques are misplaced since despite being published by a leading university press, this is not a work of academic history, but rather a tale of exotic creatures aimed at a broad audience. Still one can lament that Grigson did not take the opportunity to ask such a readership to engage with the relevant and ever more pressing issues of racism, environmental destruction, and the exploitation of nonhuman animals.

Notes

[1]. Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 20.

[2]. For example, William Granger and James Caulfield, *The New Wonderful Museum, and Extraordinary Magazine: Being a Complete Repository of All the Wonders, Curiosities, and Rarities of Nature and Art, from the Beginning of the World to the Present Year ... Including, Among the Greatest Variety of Other Valuable Matter in this Line of Literature (from an Illustrated Edition of the Rev. Mr. James Granger's Celebrated Biographical History) Memoirs and Portraits of the Most Singular and Remarkable Persons ...* (London: Hogg and Co., 1804), cited by Grigson on p. 105.

[3]. Harriet Ritvo, "On the Animal Turn," *Daedalus* 136 (2007): 118–122.

[4]. Harriet Ritvo, *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 205.

[5]. Granger and Caulfield, *The New Wonderful Museum*, 710-711.

[6]. For a critique of a non-imperialist interpretation of the zoo, see J. F. M. Clark's review of Takashi Ito's *London Zoo and the Victorians, 1828–1859* in *Isis* 106, no. 4 (2015): 943-944.

[7]. Rothfels, *Savages*, 56.

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